

America is a compassionate and generous land. With their good works, volunteers are living out the spirit of this season, and year-round they are showing the heart and soul of our people, which is the greatest strength of our Nation.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11:26 a.m. on December 19 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 20. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 19 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in a Visit With Angel Tree Children in Alexandria, Virginia

December 22, 2003

The President. Hey everybody.

Rev. Lee A. Earl. Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much, Reverend Lee. Thank you so much for having us here. Lee, thank you very much. Merry Christmas to everybody.

Audience members. Merry Christmas.

The President. We are so honored to be here to celebrate the Angel Tree Christmas. This is a program in which people who love you a lot want you to have a merry Christmas. And I want to thank you. I want to thank Chuck Colson and Mark Earley of the Prison Fellowship program, which has been hosting and organizing the Angel Tree program since 1982. Six million boys and girls have received a gift on Christmas, and I want to thank you very much for doing that.

Our attitude is—I know that the reverend here at Shiloh shares this attitude—that we change America one heart and one soul at a time; that everybody matters, everybody counts; that every child has got a hopeful and bright future; and each of us has a responsibility of loving that child with all our heart and all our soul. And it's important that all of us during this time of—joyous time, this holiday, recognize that probably the greatest gift you can possibly give is to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself.

And that's what we're doing today. We're honoring that call to love and the call to service. And so Laura and I are thrilled that you're here. We look forward to joining the good reverend here as we pass out some of the gifts to the boys and girls.

Reverend Earl. Absolutely. And thank you for the gifts that you've provided.

The President. Well, thank you very much. We're honored to be here.

We want to wish you a merry Christmas, and we've got some gifts to give out. Don't we, Laura?

The First Lady. Yes, we have a lot of gifts to give out.

The President. Where do we want to start?

The First Lady. I don't know where to start. [Laughter]

The President. Right over here? Okay, good.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:20 p.m. at the Shiloh Baptist Church. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Lee A. Earl, senior pastor, Shiloh Baptist Church; and Charles W. Colson, founder, and Mark Earley, president, Prison Fellowship Ministries.

Remarks on Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah and an Exchange With Reporters

December 22, 2003

The President. Thank you all. Welcome. Hanukkah celebrates a great miracle and a great victory, the triumph of faith over tyranny.

More than 2,000 years ago, the land of ancient Israel had been conquered, and the practice of Judaism was outlawed. Yet a patriot named Judah Maccabee and his followers courageously captured Jerusalem. As the Maccabees prepared to rededicate the holy temple, they found enough oil to last for only one day. But the oil lasted for 8 days, a miracle that we remember by lighting the menorah.

The Jewish tradition calls on us to honor every commandment with works of beauty. This beautiful menorah, more than two centuries old, is from the Spertus Museum in

Chicago, and Laura and I are honored to have it here at the White House.

I want to thank the Kol Sasson from the great University of Maryland for joining us today, and thank you for lending your beautiful voice for this occasion.

Tonight as we prepare to light the candles, we hope and pray that all who live under tyranny will see their day of freedom and that the light of faith will always shine through the darkness. We also pray for the brave men and women of our Armed Forces, many of whom are spending the holiday season far from home and their loved ones. We are grateful for their service to America. We're grateful for the support and sacrifice of their families.

And now, Jacob Murphy and Sidney Hallem will help us light the candles. Their fathers are serving in our United States Armed Forces with distinction and with honor.

[At this point, the menorah was lit.]

Holiday Travel

Q. Mr. President, do you have any words for Americans who are worried about traveling this holiday season?

The President. My words are these: Our Government is doing everything we can to protect our country. We've got a lot of really decent, hard-working Americans who will be working over the holiday season to do everything we can to protect Americans from harm. And I want to thank them for their efforts, thank them for their hard work. American citizens need to go about their lives, but as they do so, they need to know that governments at all levels are working as hard as we possibly can to protect the American citizens.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:32 p.m. in the Bookseller's Area in the East Wing at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to a cappella singing group Kol Sasson.

Christmas Message to the Members of the Armed Forces

December 24, 2003

Laura and I send greetings to the men and women of our military. Many of you are far from home during the holidays. We know you miss the people you love, especially this time of year. Your family and friends and fellow citizens miss you too—and our whole country is proud of you.

All who serve in our military are protecting the American people in a time of challenge and danger. You are confronting terrorists abroad so that we don't have to face them in our own country, and so that people around the world can live in peace. By spreading freedom and democracy, you are making our future more secure.

As your Commander in Chief, I am proud of every one of you. Some of your comrades have been wounded, and we pray for their recovery. Some have given their lives. This Nation will never forget their service and sacrifice, and in this holiday season we pray that God will comfort the families they left behind.

The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world; it is God's gift to humanity. Americans are blessed to have men and women like you protecting us, and defending the cause of freedom across the world. May God bless you, and may He watch over our country.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This message was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 25 and follows the text as printed in the December 24 edition of USA Today. An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Statement on the Earthquake in Iran

December 26, 2003

Laura and I heard this morning of the earthquake centered in the city of Bam, Iran. We are greatly saddened by the loss of life,